

Domino Writing: Solitaire Role Playing

Copyright Andrew Domino (www.dominowriting.com/games.html), last updated May 15, 2016

Playing a tabletop pencil-and-paper RPG is always more fun with a group of people, but sometimes schedules don't work out, or you just want to test a new rule or adventure you've written. There's only one Rule Of Solitaire Role Playing:

Do what makes sense for whomever you're playing as at that moment.

When you're playing by yourself, you have to play each PC, all the NPCs and all the monsters. Obviously, since you're both GM and players, you can't really keep secrets – but you can do what makes sense to the characters.

For example, a fantasy adventure may indicate a secret door in the wall of the dungeon room the heroes have just entered. As GM, you know the door is there, but as the PCs, you have no idea. So, make “search” rolls, just as other players would if they were taking part in the game. Another example: you roll initiative for each side in a conflict. When the villains are taking action, they're trying to defeat the heroes just as much as the heroes are trying to defeat them. You can even “fudge” dice rolls, if you like, but usually that's done to keep a PC alive or keep the story on track, and when you're GM and players, you don't necessarily have to worry about that!

Some parts of adventures and “indie” RPGs, like dialogue with NPCs, developing relationships with other player characters, and investigation scenarios, don't really work in solitaire role playing, since they're so dependent on interaction with other players in the game. However, you can write out a sample interaction, as if you were composing a bit of game fiction, based on the personalities you've developed for each hero.

I. PC Combat Tactics

Solitaire role playing is best-suited for detailed combat encounters, making it almost like a board game. Many games have tactics for monsters (like “use magic to enhance the villain's defenses, then move into combat,” or “fight until slain”), but leave the combat tactics for PCs up to the players, as they should. However, when you're both GM and players, you'll need to have a tactic for each PC, too.

Choose one combat tactic from the table for each PC in the party, or roll 1d20 for each when creating the characters. That tactic is the PC's default action in combat – obviously, a “Selective” character that prefers to hang back and fire arrows at enemies from a distance won't keep firing if there's an orc right in his face. But at the beginning of the battle, he'll stay toward the back of the room, instead of charging in like another hero might.

Feel free to let the tactic reflect the PC's personality, too; an “Opportunistic” hero who hunts for treasure before fighting will probably be hard to keep in line in an open-air market.

Two characters with the same tactic might have different approaches to combat. A “Controlling” wizard who likes to cause area of effect damage might summon lightning in every battle, while a “Controlling” barbarian could cause area effect damage by moving into the middle of a horde of enemies, then swinging his sword in a circle to slay a half-dozen foes at once.

Character motivations may be different, too: two heroes may both be “Vengeful,” in an enemy's

face when delivering the final bit of damage. But one does it because he's an assassin who needs to know his target is down, and another does it because her god calls his servants to prove their worth in warfare.

1. **Ambitious:** Eliminates the greatest threat first
2. **Cautious:** Stays in the back of the battle and aids allies, only fighting if he must
3. **Commanding:** Gives orders (which may or may not be listened to) then follows his own orders to the letter
4. **Controlling:** Prefers area of effect attacks, trying to defeat as many foes as possible at one time
5. **Curious:** Wants to know how things work (technology, unusual creatures, magic, etc.) and spends time investigating them for a possible advantage instead of simply taking them out of action and moving on
6. **Determined:** One-on-one duelist – finishes off one enemy before moving to the next
7. **Dramatic:** Flashy, prefers making unique stunts to simple attacks – he might have a pile of unique gadgets he wants to try out, or likes playing pranks on his foes
8. **Efficient:** Eliminates the easiest threat first
9. **Negotiating:** Tries to neutralize threats without bloodshed (“talks down” foes, intimidates them, etc.)
10. **Opportunistic:** Makes sure he knows where the treasure (or the door to the next room) is before getting into the fight
11. **Partnership:** Finds a combat partner (animal companion, another PC, etc.) and performs a reliable, effective attack
12. **Pragmatic:** Uses the environment (furniture, the natural world, vehicles, etc.) as his preferred weapons, often strikes from behind cover
13. **Quick:** Hit and run strikes, constantly moving and making attacks from different directions and/or against different enemies
14. **Reckless:** Charges in, regardless of consequences, sometimes even before the party has made a plan
15. **Selective:** Prefers to attack from a distance
16. **Slaying:** Moves into the thick of battle and attacks anyone and everyone who comes near
17. **Unexpected:** Does something different each time – roll once on this table before each encounter; if you roll “Unexpected” before an encounter, the character has the same combat tactic as he did in the last encounter
18. **Vengeful:** Gets up close and personal with enemies to deliver a killing blow
- 19 or 20. Roll again

II. Co-Operative Play (no Game Master)

The rule for solitaire role playing (do what makes sense for whomever you're playing as at that moment) can also be used for co-op role playing, where all players are taking the role of adventurers, and there is no GM. If an adventure or monster description doesn't provide an enemy's combat tactics, assume its tactic is, “Move into position to make the most effective attack and fight until death.” The most effective attack is usually the one that does the most damage against the greatest immediate threat, though some enemies will take a few turns to enhance their abilities with spells or other powers before attacking.

III. The Recovery Action

To make an adventure more of a challenge, the player or players may want to limit the amount of healing available during the adventure. In combat (which starts when the first initiative roll is made and ends when the last enemy is defeated), characters can use healing spells, medical kits and other healing available to them as described in the game's normal rules. However, characters cannot heal outside of combat, except for a Recovery action: The character instantly regains ½ his or her total health (hit points, wounds, etc.), round up. Recovery can be done only once per character per game session. For an adventure that lasts several days of game time, a character also regains all health each morning when he or she wakes up. The Recovery action means characters can't expect to eventually fully heal from even the worst combats, and means the player or players may even fail to finish adventure successfully, and lose the game.

IV. Competitive Role Playing

Players and a GM who are comfortable with one another's style and okay with the idea of inter-party conflict may want to try competitive gaming. Each character gains 1 Victory Point each time he or she accomplishes one of the following tasks. The character or characters with the most Victory Points at the end of the game session wins. If a character is killed, the player loses all the Victory Points earned by that character.

Note that the characters still must accomplish the goals of the adventure as a group, and no character receives Victory Points for something that the entire party does together (like discover a treasure). Characters also earn no Victory Points for attacking, stealing from, or otherwise harming one another.

Optionally, a GM can complete too, earning 2 Victory Points per task marked with an asterisk (*) that the enemies of the adventure accomplish; the other tasks are PC-only. Use the list below to create other tasks worth Victory Points.

- ★ Be the character who makes the action that defeats 2 opponents that are weaker than the characters in a single combat encounter (every 2 opponents defeated equals 1 Victory Point)
- ★ Be the character who makes the action that defeats a single opponent with a power level equivalent to the characters (a more powerful opponent may be worth 2 or more Victory Points) *
- ★ Cause maximum possible damage on a dice roll, not counting "open ended" dice rolled again *
- ★ Do something appropriate to the character's personality that greatly helps the party
- ★ Do something appropriate to the character's personality that greatly hinders the party
- ★ Do something that makes the GM and/or players laugh out loud *
- ★ Roll a critical failure or critical miss *
- ★ Roll a critical success or critical hit *
- ★ Survive attacks by 2 or more opponents in the same turn without suffering any damage *
- ★ Use a power or ability intended for combat to accomplish a non-combat activity
- ★ Use a power or ability not intended for combat to make a successful attack